

# LINCOLN LORE

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## A JOHN C. CALHOUN MYTH

The weekly magazine *Time* for October 27, 1941 utilizes a whole column plus an illustration (p. 21), to repeat some untenable folk lore, which dependable historians discarded years ago along with other similar accusations reflecting on the honorable paternity of Abraham Lincoln. This revised version makes Lincoln's sainted mother a barmaid, his devout pioneer father the drunken hired hand of a slave trader, and the President himself an illegitimate child who probably saw the marriage of his mother and his alleged putative father.

The magazine itself apparently shares in the premise and clearly indicates its own position of uncertainty about Lincoln's legitimacy, when it looks forward to some final proof of Lincoln's parentage in the Lincoln manuscripts to be opened at the Library of Congress in 1947.

The new emphasis on the John C. Calhoun parentage of Abraham Lincoln was supplied by Felix E. Alley, a judge of the Superior Court of North Carolina, in his recently published book, *Random Thoughts and the Musings of a Mountaineer*. While the atmosphere of jurisprudence prevades the Lincoln parentage discussion, the same story used by Judge Alley was printed in four installments in the *Columbia (S. C.) State* during the year 1911. A similar story was also released three years later in Arthur's *Western North Carolina* (p. 318).

Few people have challenged the integrity of Lincoln, and his word was good with nearly everybody, even with his most ardent opponents. If there was any question in Lincoln's mind about the authenticity of his birth date, his birthplace, or his paternity, he would have been the last one to make positive false statements about them. Abraham Lincoln said, "My father's name is Thomas Lincoln." Judge Alley says Abraham's father was John C. Calhoun. Abraham Lincoln said, "I was born February 12, 1809." Judge Alley says Abraham was probably born before June 6, 1806. Abraham Lincoln said he was born "in Hardin County, Kentucky." Judge Alley claims Abraham was born in one of the Carolinas.

Three specific statements in Judge Alley's argument may be observed:

1. The Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks "marriage was performed on June 12, 1806."

2. Judge Alley "strongly suspects that the child (Abraham) saw the marriage ceremony."

3. Calhoun's intimacy with Nancy Hanks occurred at her Aunt Ann's tavern at Craytonville, S. C. "Calhoun was just then beginning law practice, stopped there often on way home from court."

Statements 1 and 2 imply that Abraham was born previous to June 12, 1806, therefore the illicit relation at the tavern in Craytonville must have occurred some time previous to October 1805, but John C. Calhoun, according to his biographers, was in Litchfield, Connecticut at that time. Calhoun graduated from Yale in 1804, where he had been a student for two years, and immediately went to Litchfield where he remained in a law school for eighteen months.

When statement number 3 is introduced, the fallacy of Judge Alley's argument becomes more evident, as Calhoun did not start his apprenticeship in a Charleston, S. C. law office until 1806. He was not admitted to the bar until 1807, which date is much too late for him, as a practicing lawyer, to have stopped at the Craytonville tavern and to have become responsible for a child born in 1806.

What Judge Alley really wants to do is to use two birthdays for the President, one in 1806 and another after 1807, but with the acceptance of the marriage papers in 1806, he must also accept the geographical citation on the papers as well as the date. Duly recorded documents show the Lincoln-Hanks ceremony to have been performed in Washington County, Kentucky.

The predicament in which the judge finds himself is to locate John C. Calhoun and a certain Nancy Hanks in the

same community at the same time. Previous to 1806 when he locates a girl named Nancy Hanks in North Carolina, John C. Calhoun is in Connecticut and when Nancy Hanks Lincoln is in Kentucky in 1806 and thereafter, John C. Calhoun is in North Carolina. If such evidence were before the Judge in a paternity case in his court, we wonder if he would expect progeny of a man and a woman who were living 500 miles apart and had in all probability never seen each other.

One other witness might be summoned for questioning in this paternity case. The judge claims that Thomas Lincoln received \$500 from John C. Calhoun for taking Nancy Hanks away from Craytonville before her child was born.

Duly authorized public records and contemporary account books allow us to locate Thomas Lincoln with remarkable precision during this period when he was supposed to have been carousing around in the Carolinas. It might be observed that after June 12, 1806, the dates locating Thomas Lincoln, would also establish the residence of his wife, Nancy Hanks Lincoln. A brief chronology of dates associated with Thomas Lincoln from 1805 to 1808 inclusive is presented:

1805—Jan. 1, 14, February 9, 13, 27, purchased goods in store at Elizabethtown, Kentucky. March, appointed patroller in Hardin County, Kentucky. April 2, May 15, 25, June 12, July 27, August 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, September 9, 18, 26, October 2, December 2, bought merchandise on these dates in Elizabethtown.

1806—Feb. 18, received twenty-one pounds for merchandise delivered to Elizabethtown merchant; Feb. 27, bought load of hay for his horse; March, left Elizabethtown to take flat boat of goods to New Orleans; May 3, makes purchases in Elizabethtown; May 16, Bleakley and Montgomery pay him sixteen pounds for trip to New Orleans, Thomas also buys cloth for wedding suit and other items; May 20, 22, 24, June 2, 4, buys more goods at store. JUNE 12 MARRIED NANCY HANKS IN WASHINGTON COUNTY, KENTUCKY. June 14, had removed with bride to Hardin County, made purchases of skeins of silk, knives and forks, etc., in Elizabethtown store; June 18, 21, August 4, 6, 14, September 13, October 21, November 13, other purchases made at store.

1807—January 3, 15, 21, March 9, 25, April 23, 25, 27, July 2, August 4, September 19, October 3, 25, and November 2 are dates on which Thomas was carrying on some transaction in Elizabethtown. It was also in Elizabethtown in 1807 that the first child of Thomas and Nancy Lincoln was born, a daughter named Sarah.

1808—February 22, April 23, 25, May 6, 9, 13, 16, 31, June 3, 17, October 8, and November 5 are dates on which there is some notation proving Thomas Lincoln's presence in Elizabethtown and on December 12 of this year he paid Isaac Bush \$200 cash for the farm where Abraham Lincoln was born three months later.

It will be observed that during the month of May 1808 there are five dates submitted on which Thomas Lincoln was in Elizabethtown, where he was living in a cabin on which he had been paying taxes for two years in succession. On one of the dates in May, among his purchases was three dozen buttons, which should imply the presence of a woman in his cabin home. It was in this same month of May 1808 that the unborn life of Abraham Lincoln began.

If the admirers of John C. Calhoun or any one of his many rivals for the paternity of Abraham Lincoln can prove that during the month of May 1808 the paternal aspirant in question was in Elizabethtown, Kentucky and visited Thomas Lincoln's cabin home, where there was a mother with a baby girl fifteen months old in her arms, and there became intimate with Mrs. Thomas Lincoln, then there would be some basis for the sordid stories circulated in the political campaign of 1861.